

TITLE: Interview with Erna Flegel

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STRATEGIC SERVICES UNIT, WAR DEPARTMENT
MISSION FOR GERMANY
U. S. FORCES, EUROPEAN THEATER

APO 742
30 November 1945

SUBJECT: Interview with Erna Flegel - Report Attached

TO : Brigadier General G. Bryan Conrad, GSC
Director of Intelligence

1. Attached is an interview with Erna Flegel, who was a nurse in the Fuehrerbunker during the last days before the capture of Berlin by the Russians. Although Erna Flegel never belonged to the Nazi Party, she is a fanatical admirer of Hitler and a definite supporter of Nazi doctrines.

2. This statement was secured in German by one of the officers of this detachment. The only other distribution which this document has had in OMGUS is to Col. Hohenthal.

/s/ Richard Helms
/t/ RICHARD HELMS
Lt. Comdr., USNR
Commanding Officer
Berlin Detachment/SSU

Attachment

CC: Colonel R. Collins
Office of Director of Intelligence
Telephone: 76-2432

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SUBJECT: Statements of Erna Flegel, R.W., Red Cross Nurse from the Training School "Markisches Haus," Scharnhorststrasse 3. Born 1911.*

I was employed as a surgical nurse in the University Hospital on Ziegelstrasse. Since there was a shortage of doctors in Berlin, a nurse always had to be present in the air raid shelter in the Reichs Chancellery when there was an air raid alarm, for first aid in case it was necessary for injuries, etc. The same was true for the Fuehrer's shelter which belonged to his private residence, Wilhelmstrasse 77. The air raid service was first assigned to me in January 1943. For this purpose, when there was an alert, I was called for with a car at the University Hospital, transported there, and after the end of the raid transported back to the hospital again. During the raid I stayed in the First Aid room of the shelter. When Berlin came under direct artillery fire, I stayed there all the time. It was a small room, to which a second room belonged, the operating room in the Reichs Chancellery on Vosstrasse. Properly, only SS units who had been injured were brought there. The physician in charge there was Oberarzt and Obersturmbannfuehrer Professor Haase from the University Hospital. When the ring around Berlin kept drawing closer and closer, we had to keep the injured there who had formerly been carried away to the hospitals after air raids. In the course of the fighting, we grew to be a large hospital—about 500 wounded.

After November 1944 Hitler stayed in Berlin continuously, with the exception of the Christmas holidays—and then one time he had been at the Oder front. Besides Hitler and the staff of the Chancellery, the Mohnke Combat Group was always present. Mohnke himself had his quarters in the Reichs Chancellery.

In the middle of April, Goebbels had his family come in from Schwanenwurder, at first to the Propaganda Ministry, but on 20 April he moved over with his wife and the six children into the shelter of the Reichs Chancellery. Hitler was fond of the Goebbels children. They gave him a great deal of pleasure; even in the last days he invited them for chocolate, which made the children very happy. In Hitler's shelter there were only one bathtub, which was naturally provided for him. He allowed the Goebbels children to bathe in it, which likewise afforded them great pleasure.

*The fate of Adolf Hitler, Eva Braun, Goebbels and other Germans who shared the Bunker with the Fuehrer during the siege and fall of Berlin in May 1945 tantalized many in the West for years following the Nazi defeat. On 30 November 45, Richard Helms of the Office of Strategic Services, assigned to Berlin, forwarded to Washington the interrogation of a nurse who had been in the Reichs Chancellery at its fall to the invading Russians. That report was lost from sight for more than 30 years. It was discovered recently by a collector of WW II memorabilia, who provided a copy to Mr. Helms. It is reprinted here because it can be viewed as a classic of intelligence reporting and for the unique insight it affords both into life in the bunker and the mental outlook of those Germans who stayed with Hitler until the end. Several authors have written about the bunker and Hitler's last days; none depicted the final events more graphically than Erna Flegel.

Besides these, Martin Bormann was also present. His brother, Paul Bormann, who didn't get along with him, had left Berlin some time before, as his wife was expecting a baby.

Schaub went to Upper Bavaria; he had a house in Kitzbuehl, Austria, and had left Berlin previously.

The following aides were present: Brigadefuehrer Albrecht, who shot himself after Hitler's death; Colonel von Below of the Air Force, who also shot himself; General Burgdorff, who later carried on the surrender negotiations with the Russians.

On 28 April, Field Marshal Ritter von Greim landed on the Pariser Platz; his pilot was Hanna Reitsch. In landing Greim was injured below the knee, and after his injury had been treated he was to have been carried in to Hitler, but he bluntly refused. Greim said concerning Hanna Reitsch: "She was my good angel, she piloted me marvelously." He was there only one day; he had been summoned to Hitler in order to take over the supreme command of the Air Force as Goering's successor, and in order to receive Hitler's orders in this connection. I had a long talk with Hanna Reitsch in the shelter in the presence of Eva Braun.

All the other generals, etc., were with Keitel outside the cauldron of Berlin.

There were present also orderlies and soldiers and the SS bodyguards, the kitchen personnel and the cleaning women. Up to the end Hitler received his special diet, which consisted of fresh vegetables; he took meals regularly.

On 21 April, for the last time, personnel of the Reichs Chancellery were taken out of Berlin by air.

When parts of Berlin were already occupied, and the Russians were coming closer and closer to the center of the city, one could feel, almost physically, that the Third Reich was approaching its end. Marines were supposed to land by plane to protect Berlin until the Wenk Army Group had arrived for the relief of the city. Wenk with his troops was already at Beelitz. But suddenly we heard that Wenk's Army Group absolutely required a twenty-four hours' rest; the soldiers were completely exhausted. Later they were entirely wiped out there. It wasn't that anything had gone wrong—it could have been expected, since in the last weeks and days so much treachery, so much cowardice and meanness had revealed itself in Hitler's immediate entourage.

Hitler required no care; I was there exclusively for the care of the wounded. To be sure, he had aged greatly in the last days; he now had a lot of grey hair, and gave the impression of a man at least fifteen or twenty years older. He shook a good deal, walking was difficult for him, his right side was still very much weakened as a result of the attempt on his life. In the period immediately after the attempt he always shook hands with us with his left hand, but that had gone away again, and toward the end he was using his right hand. It was not until November that I saw Hitler again for the first time after the attack, when he was in Berlin for a state funeral. He was taking great care to favor his right hand. At that time he was very animated, and made all sorts of jokes. When Hitler was in the room, he filled it entirely with his personality—you saw only him, aside from him nothing else existed. The fascinating thing about him was his eyes; up to the end, it was impossible to turn away from his eyes.

I assume that Hitler recognized the hopelessness of his position; he is said to have expressed himself on the subject to Professor Haase. For that very reason, I regard every rumor that Hitler is still alive as senseless, he would never have had the spiritual

and physical strength to build up a new Germany. Hitler experienced too many disillusionments at the hands of his closest friends. He no longer believed in the loyalty of Himmler. The liaison officer between them, namely, Fegelein, the brother-in-law of Eva Braun, had betrayed him. He was caught on the point of leaving Berlin in civilian clothes. This treachery affected Eva Braun very deeply.

Professor Morell was not there; he actually had a serious heart ailment, and was at Obersalzberg, where later on he died of heart disease. For some time he had been unable to move around unnecessarily.

Dr. Stumpfecker was present as his personal surgeon; also the dentist, Dr. Kunz. Both doctors were later taken away by the Russians. Dr. Kunz was the one who poisoned Goebbels' children.

The marriage of Hitler to Eva Braun took place on the 28th of April. When I learned about it, it was immediately clear to me that this signified the end of the Third Reich, for if Hitler had believed a continuation of it possible, he would never have taken this step. Now, with death facing him, he wished to thank this woman for her self-sacrificing loyalty by giving her his name. After all, she was still young and had voluntarily stayed with him in order to share his fate. On the afternoon of 28 April the marriage was performed. This incident was of little importance to us; at any rate, we saw nothing unusual in it, for Eva Braun was a completely colorless personality. When she was with a crowd of stenographers, she was in no way conspicuous among them. For example, the fact that Hitler had poisoned his wolfhound somehow affected us more. The dog received in Hitler's presence a large dose of the poison with which later others were also poisoned. He was very fond of the dog, and took his death very much to heart.

On the day of his marriage Hitler dictated his political testament until late into the night. The secretary was Miss Schroeder. On that day he probably did not go to bed until about four o'clock, or even six.

On the morning of the 29th nothing special happened. I had to go over a few times to the Fuehrer's shelter—I went there only when I needed something urgently from the First Aid room. Thus, I saw Hitler a few times. He always took his meals alone and with great regularity, too, up to the end. His food was very well prepared; this was easy to manage, in view of the tiny portions that were involved. The only luxury he allowed himself throughout the war was that he always had fresh vegetables supplied to him from Holland.

The ring around us was now drawing closer and closer, and the radio connection was broken off. It was impossible to get information from now on, except through shock troops who went out and brought reports as to where the Russians had newly established themselves in the meantime. We had water and light until the end, thanks to the technical excellence with which the installations in the shelter functioned. Also, a rather large staff of technicians had stayed behind, who constantly supervised the equipment.

At the end we were like a big family; it was a common fate which we were experiencing in an atmosphere of true comradely association. The terrific dynamics of the fate which was unrolling held sway over all of us. We were Germany, and we were going through the end of the Third Reich and of the war, concerning the outcome of which we had hoped, up to the end, for a favorable and tolerable issue. Everything petty and external had fallen away.

On 29 April in the evening, we were told that we were all to be received by Hitler. It was half past ten when we were instructed to hold ourselves in readiness. Then we went over at half past twelve. There were Professor Haase, Dr. Kunz, Professor Stumpfecker, and two or three Medical Corps enlisted men. About twenty-five or thirty people were already gathered there, the secretaries, the cleaning women, and a few strangers who had taken refuge in the shelter. They were all standing in a row. Hitler had the names of the persons he didn't know told to him, and shook hands with each one as he walked down the line. A "brown sister," who was a stranger and who had perhaps not grasped the seriousness of the moment, and the ultimate fate, expressed her thanks to Hitler because she had been admitted into the shelter, and said in conclusion: "Fuehrer, we believe in you and in a good outcome!" Whereupon Hitler replied: "Each one must stand in his place and hold out, and if fate requires it, there he must fall!" I had a feeling that for Hitler we were the forum of the German people to which he was presenting himself once more since he had no more extensive one.

On 30 April then, in the afternoon, he departed this life. We asked no questions as to how, none at all, for each one of us had the feeling on the previous evening that this was farewell. I learned of his death in a special way. Because of this feeling I have just described, my first question to the Doctor each morning was: "Is Hitler still alive?" The answer: "Yes." The same anxious question at each meeting with Dr. Haase. When the latter came out of the Fuehrer's shelter at six o'clock, I asked again: "Is Hitler still alive?" As he gave me no answer, I knew the truth. It was natural that such an event was not discussed, and that it affected us all very deeply, also that at such a time unimportant matters were of no interest at all. For, of course, we all believed that we, too, should not come out of this hell alive; we knew precisely what might be in store for us, everyone had made up his mind to that, there was no more question about it, we were paying attention only to what was essential.

Then later we learned that Hauptsturmfuehrer Schneider was required to bring gasoline from the garage of the shelter. Dr. Stumpfecker burned Hitler's body in the garden.

On the next morning after Hitler's death we were all conscious of a vacuum, our fate could not be postponed. I saw that the end was about to come. Upon the news that Hitler was dead, we were told that now we were released from our oath, and everyone was permitted to choose his own fate. The able-bodied men prepared to make a sally. We others decided not to go out with the combat group; we stayed, naturally, at our place beside the wounded. Goebbels carried on the government as well as he could, and General Brockdorff was in command. On 30 April no orders were given for the sally, for reasons which I do not understand; they were given only on the first of May, and as a result there were an unbelievably large number of dead to mourn.

Martin Bormann was among the men who took part in the sally. It is to be assumed that he met death there; for, as most of the young battle-experienced SS men fell, a relatively older man cannot have come through alive.

Flight Captain Bauer also joined in the sally.

As I have said, the Mohnke combat group then equipped itself to make the sally out of the shelter. All the able-bodied men who were still there joined with them. They tried first to get out at the exit to Potsdamer Platz, which was impossible, then they turned toward the north and in individual cases got as far as the Stettiner Bahnhof; we heard nothing more from them.

Albrecht shot himself when the combat group started out.

Goebbels died on 30 April. Mrs. Goebbels had been his guiding genius. I cannot judge whether he was wavering. Mrs. Goebbels was having a dental treatment, and I often talked with her for an hour at a time. She was far superior to the average human being. It took a resolute spirit to decide to sacrifice her own children; indeed, it required more resolution than for Hitler to take his life. She said: "Now, we too, will give up our lives." About the children, furthermore, she said, "Where shall my children go? The shame of being Goebbels' children will always rest upon them." (She said this to me on the day when the Marines were summoned. We were present when an admiral gave the order over the telephone that the Marines were to start.) The last time that I saw Mrs. Goebbels was on the morning of 30 April. We shook hands without a word, for there was nothing to say. The children died in the afternoon and the parents in the evening. Mrs. Goebbels had told the children that they would have to live in the shelter quite a long time, and that with this in view they had to be inoculated. Of course, the children were accustomed to inoculations as a result of the war. The children's bodies were not burned—the Russians found them. I heard only on the evening of the same day that Goebbles and his family were dead. All the news reports that there were came from the Fuehrer's shelter.

Fritsche, the only ranking official left (he had been in the Air Ministry), took the greatest pains after the death of Goebbels to keep everything more or less orderly and to find the best way of making the surrender with the Russians.

On 2 May, about ten o'clock in the morning, the Russians were there. We had marked our section with Red Cross flags. At first they went through the shelter, and respected the Red Cross absolutely. Nothing happened either to the wounded or to us, nor did they take anything away from us. We were even permitted to lock ourselves in at night; the Russian Commandant's behavior was exemplary. Naturally it was a surprise to us that he gave us permission to lock our doors, but he said he could not vouch for his soldiers. Were accustomed to seeing soldiers obey orders very strictly, in contrast to which the Russian commanding officer did not seem to have this authority over his soldiers. The Russian headquarters was established at Mohnke's battle post.

The following were present in the shelter with us, in addition to the wounded: Dr. Kunz, Professor Haase, the nurses, the civilian personnel of the Fuehrer's residence and of the Reichs Chancellery, working girls who had taken refuge there, BDM* girls and their leaders. The latter, coming from the Reichsportfeld, had fled more and more into the center of the city instead of going out of Berlin. Later on these girls went to work admirably, and when the Hotel Adlon burned down, with their feeble strength they carried the wounded soldiers, a task which was giving us trouble, and after all, these girls were not at all accustomed to wounded people and to the oppressive air in the shelter. The German boys also showed a model behavior; with their slight strength they shifted ammunition; indeed, up to the end Hitler had an unshakeable faith in the German youth.

Then on 2 May individuals were taken to the Reichs Institute for the Blind on Oranien Strasse, where the Russians had set up one of their GPU offices.

I was taken there on 3 May and stayed until 10 May; I was lodged in the cellar there, and was questioned daily. Then I came back to the hospital, and just in time, for on the same day the departure by car was to take place, to the Herzberg Hospital, where we stayed until the middle of August. From there I was taken to ——ulsdorf for another interrogation by the GPU. We worked in Herzberge until we were taken as prisoners of war to Koenigswusterhausen. At first we worked under direct

*Bund deutscher Mädeln, Hitler Youth.

supervision of the Russians, but when they saw that we understood our work they let us carry on freely. Of course, we were behind barbed wire there the whole time.

Berlin, 23 November 1945

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Commentary—

The statement of Erna Flegel regarding her observation in Hitler's bunker as the Third Reich collapsed is unique—and not only because witnesses to such historical theater are rare. Its unrevised, Nazi-era spirit marks the account as authentic, from Flegel's enthralled view of Hitler to her assumption that the indescribable catastrophe she watched was but the inexorable working of fate. At the same time, the reader is drawn to admire the nurse's devotion to duty.

Comparison of Nurse Flegel's statement with the recent and acclaimed study of Hitler's last weeks by James P. O'Donnell (The Bunker, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1978) confirms that she is a good source for atmosphere and events observed firsthand. But there are inaccuracies, mainly attributable to her accepting the word of others. There is a difference between two accounts of a nurse's exchange with Hitler that suggests Flegel, although unwilling to speak against the Fuehrer seven months after his death, may have revised history in retrospect.

Flegel's statement tells that a "brown sister," a phrase that suggests a nurse more pro-nazi than the source, thanked Hitler for being admitted to his bunker, adding, "Fuehrer, we believe in you and in a good outcome!" O'Donnell's book (page 160) cites a physician's account of a reception by Hitler on the same day, at about the same time, when "my Red Cross nurse, this unusually stolid woman, broke down completely and began to sigh and moan, 'My Fuehrer, keep up your faith in final victory! Lead, and we shall follow.'" In the statement, Hitler replies that one must stand firm and fall if fate requires it; the book account has him responding that one must not seek to avoid one's destiny.

Most interesting is that the physician quoted by O'Donnell identifies his Red Cross nurse as "Sister Erna." It appears likely that these two accounts describe the same incident and the Erna Flegel was the "brown sister" she later claimed to have observed.

Nurse Flegel's statement accepts the death of Hitler without question but she lacks firsthand evidence. This was an important point in 1945. The Soviets controlled the evidence of Hitler's death and many of the Fuehrerbunker staff were imprisoned in the Soviet Union for years thereafter. More than two decades passed before Moscow decided to publish forensic proof of Hitler's death, thus spiking recurrent legends about his appearance in Argentina.